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Our Uncle Is Now Dorian Sam

By Russell Baker

WASHINGTON, Sept. 30—The odd thing is not that we are in the business of overthrowing other peoples' governments, but that we can still be surprised when somebody reminds us of it. In Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Mediterranean and the Middle East we have been propping up and knocking down governments more or less openly for the last 25 years.

It is an established policy. Everybody knows it. It is supposed to be done covertly, which is only sensible if you hope to succeed since publicity in matters of this sort can only make the natives resentful and defeat the project. Imagine the chauvinistic rallying around President Ford that would occur if Canada, say, announced that her agents were going to destabilize United States society so that discontented Americans would heave the present Government out of office.

We have been so active in the field, however, that a number of our projects have come to light. Iran, Indonesia, South Vietnam, Greece, the Congo, Guatemala, Cuba — all have been secretly interfered with by the Central Intelligence Agency, in ways that made headlines.

One of the C.I.A.'s few endearing traits is its penchant for making headlines. It is the world's most fully headlined secret agency. This is as it should be in an open society and while it is doubtless embarrassing to the C.I.A. always to have its secrets turning up on page one, we are more than compensated for its ineptitude by the opportunity thus to know ourselves.

The difficulty may be that we prefer not to know ourselves. How else can we explain the cries of shock that follow each fresh disclosure that the C.I.A. has done it again? We hear them again about the Chile intervention. In Washington, wise men who are on a first-name basis with Professor Kissinger are shocked—shocked!—to discover that the United States is overthrowing other governments.

Professional moralizers of press and television are outraged by the bloodshed induced by the new United States-approved dictatorship in Chile, although it has been very slight compared to the mass murders that outraged them in Indonesia with the overthrow of President Sukarno.

Where have these people been for the last 25 years? They must have been to be hearing it for

President Ford's public approval of exported subversion—everybody else does it; why shouldn't we?, he said—ought to have had a healthy result. It was a candid statement of a national policy in which most of us have tacitly concurred since the Stalin era.

Instead, the President is widely criticized. It is as if we don't want the President telling us the truth despite the demands for Presidents who will tell us the truth.

It is not a difficult paradox to explain. We have listened to our publicity for so long that we believe it. Since 1945 our publicity agents have been telling us we are the good guys, the white hats, the idealists struggling for democracy and freedom along dark streets swarming with the kind of thugs who overthrow other peoples' governments and put their own axmen in charge.

This is a very pleasant picture to have of yourself. It is traumatic to have people as authoritative as the President tell you it is the picture of

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Dorian Gray, and worse to have him pull the curtain away and show you what you have really come to look like after all these years of preening your beauty in the sunlight but taking all those clandestine nocturnal strolls down the back alleys of world power.

Overthrowing other peoples' governments is a habit of great imperial powers. Romans and Britons did it openly, as do the Russians today, and we differ from them only in insisting that our innocence has not been lost, that we are as pure today as we were when bedded down with empire thirty years ago.

In fact, the C.I.A. has been operating with tacit public consent from the beginning. Everybody knows it has been overthrowing governments, often bloodily, as a principle of American foreign policy for years.

The policy was never publicly adopted as such through the usual processes of debate, Congressional vote and publicly reviewed appropriations. To have done it publicly would have been too embarrassing for us. It would have required us to admit that we were not who our publicity said we were. We preferred it done out of sight, and the Government obliged.

The Government is sensitive about preserving our illusions. It does its best to keep the dreariest realities from intruding upon us. Typically, the exposure of the subversion in Chile has resulted not in any Congressional demand to do away with the policy, but in a move by the House Armed Services Committee to punish Representative Harrington for telling us what we did down there.

If we are becoming the enemy we set out to thwart, the least Congress can do is furnish ourselves with the